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Sonnets of a Portrait Painter, by Arthur Davison Ficke. Kennerley.

Mr. Ficke is a brilliant sonneteer—it goes without saying that in this sequence of fifty-seven Shakespearean sonnets he has presented as many episodes of a love-story with technical precision and eloquent richness of phrase. Therefore, if we admit his ardor and his workmanlike skill, and yet attempt a closer analysis, it is in an effort to find out why this adept art is not wholly satisfying.

In the first place, it shows a certain monotony of rhythmical pattern. These sonnets all move too much alike, with the same *tempo*, line units, pauses, etc. Read any group of them aloud, and then any group of Shakespeare's sonnets, and you will be struck anew with the variety of cadence, phrasing and *tempo* in the latter. This may seem an unfair comparison, but on the contrary it is a compliment to find a young poet worthy of reminders from the masters. Perhaps, Mr. Ficke writes too rapidly, does not wait to be haunted for days and days by magic rhythms.

Another exception is to his diction—it is not simple enough, not true to modern speech. What Elizabethan ghost gave him such lines as these?—

Strange! to remember that I late was fain
To yield death back my poor undated lease—

Of mid-night argent mad moon-archery—

Nay, all our longing compassed not such hope,
Nor did we in our flame-shot passagings,

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Push the horizon of our visions' scope
To regions of these far entangled things.

He even says, "my rival—faugh!" "my soul's swift powers", "I yearned in vain", and other stock phrases of melodrama; and in general he chooses too often the so-called "poetic" phrase, instead of the simplest possible form of modern speech which will hold his meaning.

If we point out these difficulties, it is in the way of friendly warning to a poet far too richly endowed to permit himself any carelessness. He is tempted by his own facility, by his love of rich and honied words, of storied beauty and romance.

Yet, after all, there are sonnets in this series which move proudly in their knightly robes. One of the finest is the tenth:

Come forth; for Spring is singing in the boughs
Of every white and tremulous apple-tree.
This is the season of eternal vows;
Yet what are vows that they should solace me?
For on the winds wild loveliness is crying,
And in all flowers wild joy its present worth
Proclaims, as from the dying to the dying—
"Seize, clasp thy hour of sun upon the earth!"
Oh, never dream that fire or beauty stays
More than one April moment in its flight
Toward regions where the sea-drift of all days
Sinks in a vast, desireless, lonely night.
Away with eternal vows!—and give me breath
Of one white hour here on the marge of death!

H. M.